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ABSTRACT

The efforts of language teachers in a university International Business Program (California State University, Fullerton) to develop internships, both abroad and in the United States, revealed a variety of techniques for generating interest and action. It was found that while some limited arrangements can be made through personal contacts, other resources include: cooperative, reciprocal agreements with institutions that have internship structures in place; the college or university administration, including high-level administrators and advisory board members; campus career development and placement centers and cooperative education offices; state employment offices; alumni associations and business program alumni; referrals in the business community, through individuals or professional associations; articles in the local newspaper's business section; selective telephoning to specific companies; government agencies; and student initiative, either in generating their own internships or while studying abroad. It is suggested that while large companies may be easy to identify and may offer opportunities, and medium-sized companies require time for exploration, small companies may be the most promising source of interest and offer distinct advantages in opportunity for trainees. (MSE)

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GENERATING INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCY: A NETWORKING APPROACH

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GENERATING INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCY: A NETWORKING APPROACH

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Our university's quest for internships is mainly a result of our two-year old B.A. program in International Business with a concentration in French, German, or Spanish. This is an interdisciplinary, cooperative degree sponsored jointly by the School of Business Administration and Economics and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Our program is presently expanding to encompass Portuguese and Japanese concentrations as well, and we hope to accomodate Chinese in the near future. Our geographic location in Southern California naturally turns our perspective toward the Pacific Rim.

We currently have about 230 students enrolled in the International Business and Foreign Language degree program. The mandatory internship of four months in which the students must utilize the foreign language in a business context constitutes our greatest challenge as far as the program is concerned. The idea of situating internships for considerable numbers of students still appears overwhelming at times, but we have used the past two years of "lead-time" to initiate and consolidate existing structures to deal with the situation. This has entailed a multi-faceted approach since we need both local or U.S.-situated internships for our students who do not choose to go abroad (or whom we would not necessarily

recommend for a traineeship abroad) and also for foreign interns whom we place on a reciprocal basis; we also seek foreign internship opportunities for our students who show the most promise. To facilitate our efforts, we have in all cases tried to utilize existing structures to maximum advantage, and hopefully some of our techniques can be of help if you are contemplating an internship program. The start-up costs in time, energy, and communications costs can be considerable, but so are the rewards.

In our case, the major responsibility for locating internships centers on the respective language instructors involved in the International Business Program. We have different faculty members involved for each language, and naturally we exchange pertinent information concerning a need for other languages. The coordinator for each language also has the sometimes extensive contacts of the other faculty members in each field on which to draw. This utilization of resources appears very obvious, but it is an important first step in networking. In addition, we sent a rather lengthy letter explaining our new program to 200 companies which export to Europe. We received only two responses, which was a considerable disappointment to us; however, of these two, one came from a young French businessman operating in the local area excited about the opportunities our program opened up: he has proved very willing to situate our business students in internships in France through his personal and professional contacts.

The other reply was from a U.S. company interested in engineers with foreign language competency, a request which opened up another entire field of contacts through the School of Engineering and an organization called IAESTE: International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience linked with the Association for International Practical Training. Knowledge of such groups enhances our value as perceived by potential employers. One should not despair if initial efforts to develop internships do not appear to bear fruit. One single lead can potentially bring more opportunities than can be utilized. Our second line of approach is through existing internships in Marketing, Finance, Management, Accounting and Management Information Systems set up by the School of Business Administration and Economics. We hope to develop these further to include more positions where foreign language competency is required or an asset. Direct leads from the Business School faculty are also helpful. The companies may be reluctant to accept foreign nationals, but then we have our own students to offer. Our third resource--of considerable importance--is the campus administration because of its habitual involvement in seeking financial and other support from industry.

Our campus-level administration which is supportive of efforts to internationalize the curriculum has been particularly helpful in our case. It creates the climate of confidence and assurance in which to proceed; it also insures at least some openness to costs involved, mainly in faculty time and communi-

cations costs. (If an administration is not supportive, one should present a case for the pressures to internationalize. One can argue that the positive effects of direct exchanges on students' learning processes outweigh the impact of traditional curricular improvements.)

As for the generating of internships abroad, I firmly believe that it would be relative folly to try to arrange internships in foreign countries directly on an individual basis. Of course, certain arrangements can be made with personal contacts, but in addition, cooperative, reciprocal agreements with foreign institutions, e.g., the Graduate School of Business Administration in Lyon, France, which has structures for providing internships already in place, are very helpful. Among other advantages, the host institution can ease the student's adaptation and assist in numerous ways, from helping to get visas to finding housing. A formal undertaking of this sort naturally requires the administration's backing and active participation. The support and indeed approval of the administration is of vital importance for the implementation of reciprocal agreements, and this direct involvement can lead to higher commitment to the program on its part.

The administration can also be of assistance in identifying members of the business community who could potentially accomodate local and/or foreign trainees. High-level members of the President's boards or advisory councils or even trustees, who have a broad view of business trends,

if convinced of the value of such exchanges and specifically the concrete value of enabling the institution's own students to participate in a traineeship in the U.S. or abroad, can furnish contacts and again lead the administration to a higher level of motivation and commitment to the program.

I have discussed interaction with the campus administration at length because a key to networking is linking with existing structures, organizations, and contacts.

Other good sources of leads are the Career Development and Placement Center and the Office of Cooperative Education on campus, as well as State Employment Offices, although here timing may present an obstacle with certain employers who need a position filled on a specific date. Another very fertile source for establishing business contacts is through Alumni Associations. For our International Business program, for instance, we have both the former business students and the language majors who have gone into the business world as potential contacts. Explaining to them the new orientation the school is developing has led to very positive reactions among alumni who are impressed by the combination of theory and practical experience the program offers. The advantages of good public relations work are obvious even if no specific internship results from the conversation. Seeds have been planted for future traineeships by the mere fact of informing alumni that the potential exists and that we have students available.

Furthermore, and no doubt most importantly, every call of this sort should definitely include a request for referrals. Every person contacted has an extensive circle of business acquaintances and can assess their probability of using a business trainee relatively simply. In any case, one definitely has nothing to lose by asking! Of course, these referrals may not come to mind immediately, but a follow-up letter describing the program and information on whom to contact is advisable. One may also offer to call again at a specified time.

An effective way to reach the business community in a time-efficient manner is to address meetings of business clubs, either alone or with some of the outstanding students in the program. This approach has worked well in our area with the International Marketing Association and the World Trade Center Association of Orange County. (This technique gives students invaluable exposure to business people.) The county Chamber of Commerce's international business roster is another resource. Had we been launching a large campaign, we would have also sought to have a feature article on our International Business program appear in the business section of our regional paper.

Selective telephoning to specific companies is time-consuming and can be frustrating, but this may very well be the most effective technique to obtain results. It is sometimes difficult to situate the correct person within the company with whom to talk, but the contacts developed through

persistence are definitely worthwhile, as can be all the information gleaned. Great faith in the value of what you have to offer is a key ingredient here, both in presenting your case and in withstanding discouragement. With individual calls, one does have the advantage of being able to react directly to specific concerns and tailor the conversation to correspond to the individual's needs. Furthermore, exposure to potential employers' situations and concerns can help strengthen and refine subsequent presentations.

A short summary of my observations may prove helpful at this point:

1. Large corporations are the easiest to identify: there are many business compilations, often with a list of the company officers as well as useful information about the firm's activities. The parameters of these companies, as well as their priorities, tend to be clearly defined. It is possible that your program will not fit into their plans for a reason as simple as timing, for instance; nevertheless, you have established a contact which you can continue to develop.

2. Medium-sized companies (ca. 350 employees): My experience has been that such companies require more time to explore possibilities.

3. Small companies: In some cases, these companies may be stumbled upon only by accident, but there can be great potential for interest in your "product" in certain situations. I tend to rank this category of company--if dynamic (and they have to be in order to survive)--as the most promising even

though luck or chance is involved. Through referrals and personal acquaintances, however, the task can be made easier.

The key elements one hopes to find in conjunction are

A. A receptive person in a position of authority not overburdened or preoccupied by immediate crises (jeopardizing perhaps the very existence of the business).

B. Current engagement in international business or having a basic and relatively immediate desire to expand internationally.

C. Profitability in its current operations.

D. Possibly understaffed.

These small, dynamic, entrepreneurial companies offer distinct advantages for trainees: because of the relatively unstructured nature of operations, there is considerable opportunity for the students to be exposed to almost all aspects of the operation. There is also a greater chance that the student intern may be able to contribute meaningful ideas and suggestions which will be useful to the company. The small business environment also appears more open to viewing the presence of a trainee as a resource rather than as a public service where the trainee is likely to take productive time away from a current employee.

In our particular case, we were looking for companies within close proximity to our campus in order to maximize the interaction among our business students and foreign trainees.

This policy also made housing and transportation easier to arrange. Our criteria may have precluded our finding challenging internships in the greater Los Angeles area, but our goal of facilitating cultural, intellectual, and social exchanges with our business and language students dictated our choices.

The next level of assistance, relatively goal-oriented in its specificity, is governmental organizations of various kinds. Although this type of organization can only help indirectly, foreign trade commissions or commercial attachés can furnish lists of U.S. companies with subsidiaries in the country of interest and companies of that country doing business in the U.S. Of course, one must still make individual calls or group mailings. One can also hope to induce companies to address requests for our students' services by consolidating and publicizing campus resources through development of a "Business Research and Resource Center" or some similar service for businesses on the campus.

One of the most exciting developments in the evolution of our International Business and Language Program has been the discovery that the students themselves are a valuable resource in locating traineeships. It seems to have been assumed at the beginning stages of the program that the faculty members involved in the program would take full responsibility for placing students in internships. Contrary to our expectations,

the students have shown great interest, initiative, and high motivation to participate actively in finding internship opportunities. Moreover, their involvement is definitely not limited to insuring that they themselves will find their internship, but is instead general and genuine excitement about being instrumental in obtaining internships for other students and finding ways of bringing foreign interns into our area.

Certain students are concentrating their efforts on locating internships in the local area for our students who do not care to go abroad for a period of training. These students have founded a club called The International Business Students Association which brings in speakers from the business community on a weekly basis, and in general they have done an excellent job publicizing our IB program in the business community.

Another very dynamic group founded a local chapter of the international student club called AIESEC, the French acronym for the International Association of Students in Economics and Business. Although it has normally taken four or five years to establish a local chapter of AIESEC, a small nucleus of our students achieved this goal in less than one year. Their efforts have generated four traineeships for foreign business students from Sweden, Japan, Poland, and Mexico and obtained traineeship offers for our students in France and Finland. There was, of course, a synergistic effect created

by the introduction of our International Business Program and the cooperation of our campus community, but the enthusiasm generated by this group's achievements has become a force unto itself.

Besides the fact that this group's activities offer ways for students to be responsible for their own internship, the students develop self-assurance, maturity, and sensitivity in dealing with high-ranking executives. The club's structure also forces them to organize marketing strategies, publicity campaigns, and fund-raising activities. The cultural exchanges afforded by this program alone are far-reaching and very diverse. AIESEC has the unlimited possibility of bringing young student trainees from all areas of the globe into the local area as well as for sending local students almost anywhere in the world. The opportunities for continued contacts and friendships are undoubtedly unrivaled by any other organization.

A further way of developing internships is through student initiative during a student's stay abroad for academic purposes. The student can be geared to develop contacts in the business world for a subsequent traineeship. We tend to consider all our students abroad as "ambassadors" who represent and publicize our programs in any way they can.

But the greatest advantage in the area of student initiative is the fact that as our present excited, committed students reach positions of authority in internationally-

minded companies, they will be capable of placing successive generations of students in their own companies and others through their contacts.

And so we come full circle back to the alumni network I discussed earlier. We also anticipate that our IB alumni may also become members of our advisory councils, providing ongoing contact and exchange, thus keeping academia abreast of developments in the business community.